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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD

Note verbale dated 14 October 1998 from the Permanent Mission of the State of Bahrain to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights)

The Permanent Mission of the State of Bahrain to the United Nations Office at Geneva presents its compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights) and has the honour to refer to documents E/CN.4/1998/NGO/6 dated 9 February 1998 and E/CN.4/1998/NGO/54 dated 16 March 1998, containing written statements sent to him under item 10 of the agenda of the Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-fourth session from two non-governmental organizations, the International Federation of Human Rights Leagues (FIDH) and Human Rights Watch, alleging violations of human rights in the State of Bahrain.

The Mission is pleased to enclose herewith the reply of the concerned authorities in the State of Bahrain in this connection, and requests that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights circulate the said reply to all States Members of the United Nations as an official document under item 9 of the agenda of the Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-fifth session which will be held in Geneva from 15 March to 23 April 1999.

Annex

The Permanent Mission of the State of Bahrain to the United Nations Office at Geneva presents its compliment to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and has the honour to refer to documents E/CN.4/1998/NGO/6 and E/CN.4/1998/NGO/54 containing written statements from two non-governmental organizations, the International Federation of Human Rights Leagues (FIDH) and Human Rights Watch, alleging violations of human rights in the State of Bahrain.

The Permanent Mission wishes at the outset to reaffirm the absolute commitment of the Government of the State of Bahrain to the promotion and protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all its citizens, without distinction as to race, sex, religion or language. In this regard, the Permanent Mission restates the Government's policy of unqualified cooperation with United Nations human rights machinery, and refers to Bahrain's continuing dialogue with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, its working groups and thematic rapporteurs. The Government of Bahrain also fully respects and supports the motives and principles on which the international human rights movement - including organizations such a FIDH and Human Rights Watch - is founded.

However, the Permanent Mission also wishes to reiterate its concern at the dangers of abuse of the international human rights movement for blatantly political ends.

It is a regrettable fact that Bahrain has, in recent years, faced a well-planned and violent destabilization campaign, orchestrated, supported and directed from abroad, with the ultimate aim of overthrowing the country's Government. The campaign of violence against the community has been clearly and absolutely rejected by the Bahraini people, and has now collapsed. However, there remain a number of increasingly isolated and desperate individuals and groups outside Bahrain, intimately connected with that campaign, who have been unable to accept its failure.

These individuals and groups have absolutely no genuine interest in human rights, but instead continue deliberately to manipulate human rights mechanisms for their own, discredited, political ends. Their methods are crude and instantly recognizable: the production of allegations and insinuations having little if any foundation in reality and unsupported by any credible evidence whatsoever. The United Nations human rights machinery, and respected international human rights bodies, are cynically targeted and fed a steady stream of such allegations.

The two statements under response are recognizably the product of such sources. All the issues raised have been fully and clearly dealt with by the Government and Permanent Mission in previous correspondence with the Commission, the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The Permanent Mission therefore finds it regrettable that FIDH and Human Rights Watch have chosen to repeat such groundless and blatantly political allegations.

The rights and fundamental freedoms of Bahraini citizens are fully protected by the country's law and legal system. Comprehensive domestic remedies are available to any person who feels aggrieved by any alleged improper act of the Government or any of its officials, including recourse to appropriate legal action. Further, assault, torture, abuse of office and the improper deprivation of a person's liberty are all criminal offences under Bahraini law.

Closer investigation of allegations from the above sources invariably reveals that no complaint, or attempt to complain, has been made by or on behalf of any of the alleged victims. Given the ready availability of domestic remedies, this omission is particularly noteworthy, and serves further to undermine the credibility of such sources.

Despite Bahrain's limited size and resources, the Government is committed to guaranteeing citizens' basic rights to employment, health, education and housing, in the context of sound and sustainable development. To this end, the Government provides free education, free health care for all backed by a comprehensive system of welfare provision. It has also facilitated development of systems of low-cost finance to assist citizens with affordable, subsidized housing. The fruits of such policies are clearly demonstrated by the statistics, and have been consistently recognized internationally: the United Nations Development Programme Human Development Report, 1998 ranks Bahrain first in the Arab world for its achievements in the human development field for the fourth consecutive year.

Citizens enjoy direct personal access to the Amir and government officials, and there is widespread public discussion on important issues. Formal and informal systems of popular participation in government have evolved over the years in line with Bahrain's culture and beliefs, and the wishes of its people. The latest manifestation of such evolutionary development is the Shura (Consultative) Council. The Council is composed of 40 members representing a broad cross-section of the Bahraini community and includes academics, lawyers, businessmen and workers' representatives. The Council has considerable powers to initiate and review legislation, and has actively taken a lead on many contentious social and economic issues. Further such developments will occur only as a result of the will of the people of Bahrain - they cannot and will not be imposed by violence or force.

The State of Bahrain fully recognizes that all human rights are universal, and has always urged the international commuity to treat human rights as a global concern, with due respect paid to cultural and religious particularities. To this end, Bahrain is a party to a number of international conventions in the field of human rights. Most recently, Bahrain acceded to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The State of Bahrain places the utmost importance on its obligations in respect of all conventions to which it is a party, and is giving ongoing serious consideration to becoming party to other international treties in the field of human rights.

Bahrain is also keen to develop further its close cooperative relationships with non-governmental organizations, and welcomes constructive dialogue with bona fide international human rights organizations. Further,

the Government's active commitment to human righs issues has been demonstrated by the 28 October 1996 memorandum of understanding with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), pursuant to which the ICRC conducts regular independent inspection visits to prisoners in Bahrain with the full and unqualified cooperation of the Government.

The Government of the State of Bahrain fully recognizes its responsibility to uphold fundamental rights and freedoms in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and will not accept any attempt to violate or compromise such rights and freedoms.

The Permanent Mission respectfully requests that the Commission on Human Rights take the above fully into account when dealing with allegations of human rights abuses in Bahrain.